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ABSTRACT

Fifty percent (260) of the women in the United States identified as holding positions of superintendents, assistant/associate superintendents, and high school principals responded to questionnaires concerning career contingencies, career patterns, and career attitudes. Based on data from previous studies of men administrators, the women were, as a group, more heterogeneous as revealed by the informal career attributes of marital status, race, religion, and politics. Women have less geographical mobility than men. More women have only a bachelor's degree; however, more women superintendents (33 percent) than men superintendents (12 percent) have obtained doctorates. Women entered teaching earlier than did men, but their teaching careers were often discontinuous. Further, women decided to enter administration and to seek advanced degrees when they were older than their male counterparts. Women find job characteristics more important than position title or salary, and experience higher job satisfaction than men. (Author/ELF)

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CAREERS IN EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION:

ARE WOMEN THE EXCEPTION?

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The career paths and attitudes of school administrators, especially of superintendents, have been fairly well documented (Carlson, 1972; Hemphill, 1965; Knezevich, 1971), and normative descriptions exist of their personal attributes. These studies, however, have focused on men, a fact which is understandable given that the overwhelming majority of school administrators in the United States are men. The assumption in these studies, as well as in other studies about careers and occupational socialization, has been that men's careers provide the norm, and women's careers are the exception.

It is known that less than 20% of elementary principals, less than 2% of secondary principals, and less than 1% of district superintendents are women (NEA, 1973). Beyond these numbers, however, we know little about who the women are, how they came to have careers in administration, and how they view those careers. This study was undertaken to learn more about women who are superintendents, assistant/associate superintendents and high school principals in the United States, and who thus join men in those positions as policy makers for American education.

The Sample and Instrumentation

In the spring of 1977 a questionnaire was developed. It was adapted from questionnaires of previous studies so as to allow comparisons with men

administrators where possible (Carlson, 1972; Gross and Trask, 1976; Hemphill, 1965; Knezevich, 1971; Rose, 1967). The questionnaire was mailed to all women in the United States who were identified as holding one of the three positions noted above. Six hundred nineteen individuals were identified through state school directories or lists from state departments of education as women in the specified positions. Of these, 42 were returned by men who were misidentified and 65 were returned by women who held positions other than those specified. Of the 512 remaining positions which are assumed to be correctly identified, 260 completed questionnaires were returned and three questionnaires were returned by women who did not wish to participate. The usable questionnaires represent 50% of the potential respondents.*

Usable returns were received from all geographic regions; 93 superintendents (44.2%), 118 assistant/associate superintendents (52.9%), and 97 secondary principals (34.2%) responded. Although the return rate from principals was disappointingly low, the data on those questionnaires were used since the demographic features of this sample closely resembled those of a previous study of female high school principals (Baron, 1976). The responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics, simple crosstabulations, and chi-squares.

Three basic categories were investigated: (1) career contingencies--those informal attributes which appear to be important for the hiring of

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*This assumes that all individuals who did not return questionnaires were women holding one of the identified positions; in fact, the sample may actually represent a larger percentage of women administrators.

school administrators and how they work for men and women; (2) career patterns of women and their comparison to those of men; and (3) career attitudes of women as compared to men.

Career Contingencies

Certainly one's acceptance into an administrative position depends upon formal qualifications. School administrators need to meet formal standards and qualifications which are determined by each state. Yet obtaining a position in school administration may often depend upon, or be related to, factors which are not closely related to that position. For instance, among educational administrators, certain attributes occur more frequently than they do in the general population or even within the population of professional educators. When such attributes consistently appear among a population of position holders, one might assume that there are informal criteria governing the selection of people. Educational administrators are "disproportionately middle-aged, native-born, male, married, white Protestants from non-urban backgrounds" (March, 1976, p. 14). There are a notable absence of minority members, Jews, Catholics, divorced or single people, and women.

Do these attributes serve as informal criteria or career contingencies in the selection of school administrators? Women who seek administrative positions ipso facto do not fulfill the requirements of one of the most visible attributes for a career in educational administration--that of being male. This investigation of the attributes of women who have become school administrators suggests that once the informal attribute of maleness

is overcome, other attributes which typify the male administrators are not as rigid for women. That is, the small number of women who hold administrative positions in our nation's schools are as a group more heterogeneous than the population of men administrators. This is revealed by a closer look at the informal career attributes of marital status, race, religion, and politics.

Marriage. Women in this sample included 21.4% who were never married, 51.5% who were married for the first time, 9.8% who were remarried, 9% who were divorced, and 8.3% who were widowed. While the figures for women correspond to national averages for working women (Kievet, 1972), they are far below the figures for men administrators. In Carlson's 1972 study, of male superintendents none were never married, 97.6% were married the first time, 2.4% remarried and none were divorced, or widowed.

This and other studies indicate that marriage is clearly a career contingency which works differently for men than women. While male school administrators are expected to be married, for women marriage is at best a double bind. Gross' study (1955), for example, showed a strong disposition against hiring a married woman as superintendent. Indeed, there seems to be a "Catch-22" element for women seeking an administrative post--a married woman is expected to have first allegiance to her family, while an unmarried woman is often considered a threat or an invader (Carlson, 1976; Epstein, 1970; Russo, 1976). In either case, the woman is sometimes thought to have personal "problems" that would inhibit her effective functioning as an administrator.

The divided role of professional and homemaker is one of the biggest barriers to women's career development. It is mentioned as a barrier by women respondents more frequently than any other, and it arises repeatedly in literature on the working woman (Epstein, 1970; Howe, 1975; Theodore, 1971). As Howe notes, the "career system is shaped by and for the man with a family who is family-free" (1975, p. 70). The problem of the working wife/mother is generally seen as the woman's problem; she must choose between a few prepackaged options; the result of having to make this choice is "structured strain, caused by a combination of an overdemanding set of role obligations, lack of consensus as to the hierarchy of obligations, and the clash of obligations from home and occupational statuses" (Epstein, 1970, p. 134).

The women in this study used their own words to verify this concept of home and family responsibilities as career barriers. One woman wrote, "The barriers were cultural expectations I accepted--the need to concentrate efforts in the early years of marriage on promoting my husband's career." Another woman agreed that a primary barrier to her career was "my own feeling that I needed to give primary attention to my family until the youngest was in school. This took 17 years out of my professional activities." "I am in a higher position than my present lifestyle can accomodate (2 preschoolers!)," wrote a principal. Added a superintendent, "I sometimes wonder whether it all is worth it."

Despite their considerable career responsiblities, almost half (42.7%) of the women in this study reported that they took full responsibility for

both housework and cooking. The remaining women shared housekeeping responsibilities in various ways.

Some role obligations and conflicts may have been alleviated by the fact that most of the women who had children had older children. Over 46% had children over the age of 18, and many with school-age children had only high schoolers at home. As a consequence, children at present did not require as much of the women's time and energy. Nevertheless, women did experience role conflict in their home and career responsibilities One principal summed up what many others had written, "We are not being fair to young women by telling them that they can do what homemakers do and have a career besides. It is a physical impossibility."

Race. Women in top management positions are predominately white, as are their male counterparts. According to 1974 statistics, blacks comprised 6% of school administrators (a larger category including superintendents) and 8% of the principals (both secondary and elementary) (EEOC, p. 4). Within our sample of women administrators there were 19% (18 total) high school principals and 15% assistant superintendents who were black. No black female superintendents were included among the respondents although there areknown to be a few in the populatior.

More recent statistics would undoubtedly show an increase of minority males as school administrators. However, race continues to be an important career contingency for men and school selection committees appear hesitant to hire minority males. On the other hand, race appears not to be as important a career contingency for females, although it remains a rather pervasive contingency for the superintendency for both men and women.

Religion. Men administrators are disproportionately Protestant, as are the school boards who hire them (Jennings and Zeigler, 1969). Moreover, school boards not only believe superintendents should be Protestant, but that they should also be active church members (Gross, et al, 1958). Indeed one study went to far as to say it was virtually impossible for anyone other than a practicing Protestant to become a superintendent in Indiana (Sharpe, 1959).

Religion does not appear to function as a career contingency for women in the same way it does for men. Fifty-nine percent of the respondents were Protestant, 16% were Catholic, 1% were Jewish, and 23% reported no affiliation. Furthermore, less than half of the women indicated a strong religious affiliation. The larger proportion of Catholics among women administrators may be due to their early educational training and role models in parochial schools. However, it is remarkable that so few Jewish women have entered administrative positions, given their numbers in teaching, particularly on the East Coast.

Political and Civic Organizations. Men administrators overrepresent the Republican party; about 45% of male superintendents identified themselves as Republican compared to the national average of 27% (Carlson, 1972). Women's political affiliation tends to follow national trends; among women superintendents, 27% identified themselves as Republican, 49% as Democrat, and 24% as Independent. While some of these differences may be attributed to different survey periods and a changing political climate, it may also be due to the greater number of women who are minorities, non-Protestant, or

born to parents with relatively high levels of education--all factors which predispose one away from being a Republican.

Another difference between men and women who are administrators is the civic organizations to which they belong. Women administrators generally participate only in professional organizations, whereas men participate quite actively in community organizations. One woman offered an explanation for this disparity, "Jaycees, Optimists, Lions, Elks, etc., don't allow women." Another said, "I am not eligible to join the Rotary which is how one gets known. . .I know a lot of mothers. That, however, is not quite the same thing."

In summary, on a national basis, women in educational administration exhibit some patterns and trends in their careers which are different from those of men in comparable positions. Sex appears to be a powerful contingency in educational management careers, given the small number of women who hold such positions in the public schools, and it seems to affect other contingencies. It may well be that sex is the greatest career contingency at present in educational administration, and that once that barrier has been surmounted, other attributes no longer carry weight as necessary pre-conditions for employment.

Career Patterns of Men and Women Administrators

Institutions affect the careers of individuals through the shared expectations of those who control or speak for the organization. These expectations are evident in recruitment, sponsorship, promotion and succession practices and in individuals who climb the career ladders. That is, qualified

individuals who understand institutional expectations are able to move into high level positions.

Almost all studies of careers have looked at men's careers as being the norm. Women's careers, on the other hand, generally have been thought to be the exception. In this study, women's career patterns were directly compared to what was already known about men's career patterns in educational administration in order to determine the extent to which women's careers were "normal." Academic training, experience, and geographical mobility were investigated to determine career patterns.

Academic Training. Although obtaining an advanced degree may not be necessary for entry into an administrative position, graduate study of some sort is usually a prerequisite for remaining in that job. Almost all states have administrator certification requirements, and most states insist on their administrators having at least a master's degree (Kane, 1976). The level of graduate training can perhaps provide information about career aspirations of individuals if we presume that individuals who are seeking better positions will also be more likely to pursue the academic degree required for those positions.

Women administrators differ from their male cohorts in their academic training for administration. Significantly more women (19%) than men (2%) have only a bachelor's degree. However, at the other end of the continuum, significantly more women superintendents (33%) than men superintendents (12.5%) have obtained doctorates. Many more men than women have specialist degrees.

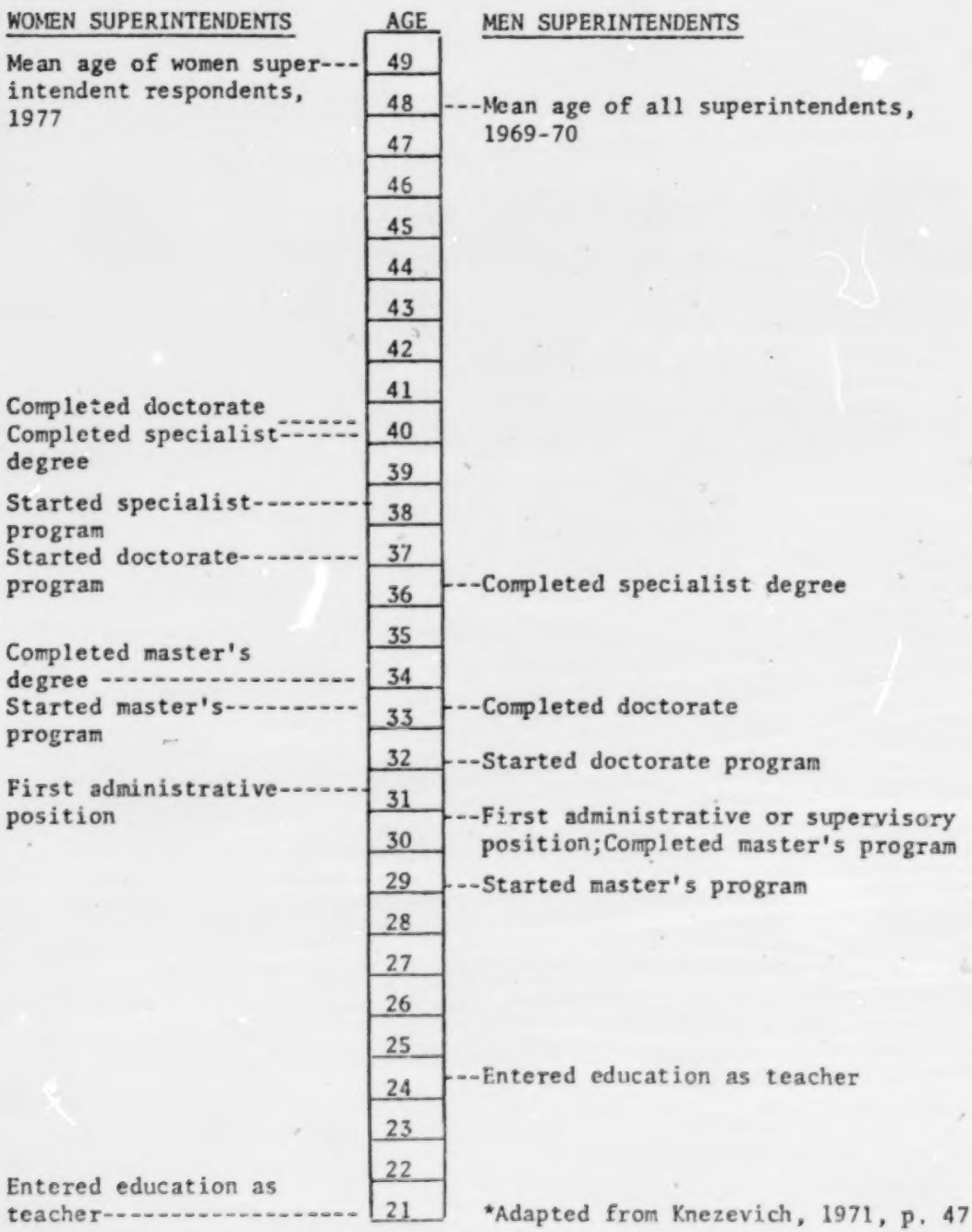
Even when women earned advanced degrees, they did so later in their administrative careers than did men. Although there is no information on

men principals, we know that men superintendents completed their master's degrees at about age 32 (Knezevich, 1971). For women superintendents, the corresponding age is 33.8 years. Other studies indicate that men administrators begin their advanced studies as a kind of pre-service or preparatory training, while women seek advanced training as in-service training after moving in an administrative position. Training for administration thus appears to serve a different purpose for women than for men. For men, it is a tool needed to achieve an administrative position, while for women it is a means for retaining a position already achieved and for improving one's performance in that position. This is further illustrated in the following table.

Experience. With rare exceptions, all administrators begin their careers in the classroom; that experience becomes the first rung in the administrative career ladder. Although both men and women administrators had considerable experience as teachers, the women in this study have spent more time as teachers than their male counterparts. Most of the men have had seven or less years of teaching experience, while most of the women have had nine or ten years of experience. The differences are especially notable for superintendents; 52% of women superintendents have had ten years or more of teaching experience, while only 23% of men superintendents have had as much classroom experience. The longer classroom time means that women enter administration at a later age than men and thus have had, on the average, a briefer career in administration.

MEAN AGES OF WOMEN AND MEN SUPERINTENDENTS AT

MILESTONES IN THEIR GRADUATE STUDY AND PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE*



*Adapted from Knezevich, 1971, p. 47

When a career is interrupted or discontinuous, one's ascent up a career ladder is slower. It is thus particularly important in the study of careers in education that women in this study more frequently had discontinuous careers than did men.

Men in educational administration rarely interrupt their educational careers to work in other jobs. When outside jobs do interrupt men's careers, the interruptions almost always occur during their teaching, rather than their administrative, years.

The story for women is quite different. Even if we exclude short-term maternity leave but include homemaking and child rearing as "jobs", albeit unpaid, almost one-half (49.1%) of all women administrators in this study have worked outside education since receiving their bachelor's degree, and of those almost half have interrupted their administrative careers. The most frequent reason for women's career discontinuities was child bearing and rearing.

Two interesting differences in men's and women's breaks in service are the length of the break and the career relatedness of the break. Men who worked outside education spent fewer years outside education than did women. In addition, most of the men who worked outside education were employed in either the military or in business (Hemphill, 1965, Knezevich, 1971). Women, on the other hand, spent most of their time outside education as homemakers. Being a homemaker is not usually considered to add to the skills and talents one brings to an administrative job but being in business or the military is (Epstein, 1970). Hence, women who interrupted their careers did not spend

that time in what school boards or selection committees might consider useful or relevant experience for an administrator. Thus, women are handicapped in their administrative careers before they even begin those careers.

Added to the discontinuities in women's career patterns is their older age when they enter administration. Most women in this study did not decide to seek an administrative or supervisory position until they were over 31 years old, and received the position when they were over 32 years old. On the other hand, men superintendents and principals began their administrative careers at about age 30 (Hemphill, 1965; Knezevich, 1971). Although no evidence about the age at which these men actually decided to seek an administrative position is available, Carlson (1972) suggests that for men this generally happens in the mid- to late-twenties, and that men achieve sought-after positions about three to four years after deciding to seek them. Schmuck (1975) also notes that men more frequently than women persevere in seeking administrative positions in the same district until they are successful.

Carlson (1972) described the typical career pattern of a public school superintendent as relatively short: the principalship to the assistant superintendency to the superintendency. Schmuck (1975) has suggested that the career patterns of women administrators may be quite different from men's since they may hold many staff positions between their tenure of customary line positions. However, women in this study--women who are top line administrators--did not have career patterns which differed greatly from those of men.

Women administrators in this study had both an earlier and a later start in their educational careers. They entered teaching earlier than did men, but their teaching careers were often discontinuous. Further, women decided to enter administration and to seek advanced degrees when they were older than their male counterparts.

Contrary to popular belief, not all women administrators held staff positions before becoming line administrators. This may in part be due to the small size of the districts in which many women worked. Only about one-half (54.1 percent) of the study's respondents reported having held staff positions and about half of those reported positions were in guidance or curriculum, areas which lend themselves to movement into line positions. The figures for women principals and superintendents compared favorably to the numbers of men principals and superintendents who have held staff positions (Hemphill, 1965; Knezevich, 1971). Understandably, assistant superintendents were more likely to have held staff positions; 71.6% of those women, as compared to only 39.4% of the principals, had held staff positions, usually as consultants or supervisors. This may indicate the assistant superintendency is a quasi-staff position.

Geographical Mobility. Geographic mobility is also important to a career in educational administration. While both men and women administrators are relatively immobile, women appear to be more immobile than men. Of the women in the study, 94% had been an administrator in the same state and 72% in the same district. In addition, less than half of the women were willing to move to new districts and only 28% were willing to move to new states;

Carlson (1976) reports that among male superintendents, 65% are willing to relocate. Women who had worked in more than one district were significantly more willing to move than women who had only served in one district. The women who did not want to move cited family ties and responsibilities as the primary reason. This fact of limited geographical mobility is also related to women's attitudes toward their careers which will be explored in the following section.

Women's career patterns are not significantly different from men's although women tend to be older in their first administration assignment. Once in admininstration, however, women moved through their careers in ways similar to men.

Career Attitudes

A career is viewed through its past history as well as its future; people may view their careers by looking at how far they have come or they may emphasize how far they have to go. It is somewhat similar to looking at a bottle half filled with liquid. Is the bottle half full or is the bottle half empty? This concept is known as career anchorage point. If one emphasizes past accomplishments then one is downward-anchored; if one emphasizes future placements, one is upward-anchored. Rose (1967) indicated that most (80% of superintendents) educational administrators are downward-anchored; they do not emphasize their future careers but rather how far they have come. In addition, older men are more likely to be downward-anchored.

In contrast, 43.6% of women superintendents and over half of all women administrators in this study could be typified as upward-anchored, a division

which is true for careers in general. Surprisingly, career anchorage is not related to age for women. The lack of relationship may be due to women's later entry into administration, or to women's longer life expectancy.

Somewhat surprisingly, career anchorage is not related to aspiration level, as measured by the positions women hope to hold in the future. A downward-anchored woman in this study might still aspire to a superintendency or a state-level position; in other words, although she hoped for a higher position, she was still most impressed by what she had already accomplished. We would not expect this situation among men administrators, whose aspiration levels are related to their career anchorage points.

In addition, women's points of career anchorage were not clearly related to obvious indices of success such as status or salary levels. In fact, many women who emphasized their future careers did not necessarily even have clear career goals in terms of positions they wished to hold. Job characteristics were more important than position title. One principal said, "I determined my career in terms of flexibility and access to things I like to do." For her, future career choices would be based on the same variables. "I only want to work with kids and people!!" exclaimed a superintendent.

For most women, success, and the career choices thereby implied, was something not included in standard definitions. "Success is not measured in moving from job to job in a vertical continuum," said a principal, "but rather. . .it is measured by the quality of any job held." Another principal

agreed, "Success represents ending up in a job one really likes, finds personally challenging and fulfilling, and does well." Good working relationships were rated a key to success by one woman, and "doing a job which is interesting and challenging" was chosen by another.

Job/Career Satisfaction. Male school administrators generally are satisfied with their jobs and careers (Carlson, 1976; Hemphill, 1965); women are also highly satisfied with their work. Women principals indicated a somewhat higher satisfaction than did men principals in previous studies. Eighty percent of the women principals would chose the same career; 63% of the men felt similarly (Hemphill, 1965).

We can only guess as to why women are somewhat more satisfied. Perhaps along with lower aspirations women have lower expectations for job/career satisfaction. Having "made it" in a man's world, they expect little more than what they have; hence, they are well-satisfied with both their jobs and their careers. Another explanation may be that the dissatisfied women, particularly those who are married, have more freedom to leave an unsatisfactory position because the society accepts and supports the idea that women can depend on their spouse's salaries. This is not true for men. These explanations, however, can not be verified by this study.

Women's career patterns, as evidenced in their job histories, are little different from men's. Their careers are relatively short. One-quarter of all superintendents in this study, for example, moved from teaching to a principalship to a superintendency. Some had an even shorter career pattern--18.7% moved directly from teaching to a principal-superintendency,

or to a superintendency in a small district. The shortest career path was that of one woman who reported that she became a superintendent "when I began to teach my one-room school." About 28% of women superintendent's careers included some tenure at the central office level.

Finally, the importance of timing in a career is clear. "It seems," wrote one woman, "that I often was at the right place at the right time and advanced through these quirks rather than by deliberate pre-planning."

Present and Future Status of Women Administrators

Women administrators have been in their present positions, on the average, for four and a half years. Almost half (45.2%) of the female superintendents are in their first or second year in that position. Since the latest national statistics are only available for 1974-75 we do not know whether these women will boost the .01% representation of female superintendents or whether these women's predecessors were also women. Optimism would suggest that women's representation is increasing and is an indication of increasing latitude regarding sex roles in educational administration and the impact of Title IX. One woman responded, "The era in which I decided to seek administrative positions has evidenced the importance of time in seeking advanced positions. Affirmative action and Title IX are relevant to my latter appointment." Another woman said, "It is gratifying to know how many more opportunities are now available to competent women."

Most women work in unified K-12 school districts. However, over half of the female superintendents (56.1%) work in elementary school districts

which typically are located in rural or small town areas. The isolation which must accompany these positions was reflected in one woman's answer to the question, "To whom do you directly report?" Her answer: "God."

Women assistant superintendents and high school principals more often work in suburban or urban school districts. Women principals serve in schools comparable to male principals; to be sure, the absolute number of women in the high school principalship is limited but their relative numbers at differing levels of responsibility indicate they are unlike women superintendents, who serve primarily in small school districts.

Conclusion

In retrospect, it appears that women administrators have, in general, careers which are similar to those of their male colleagues. The variations from the male norm--later entry age and career discontinuities, for example--illustrate that career patterns and attitudes are a reflection of the interaction of both institutional and individual pressures. The contingencies which institutions place on certain careers, the patterns of recruitment, sponsorship and promotion, and the barriers that are informally or formally erected influence careers in one direction. Patterns of socialization and conflicts in role performance influence careers from another, and sometimes, opposing, direction. The interaction of these forces affects both career patterns and career attitudes. Thus, a variety of influences, rather than any one variable, affect careers in any institution.

What this study has attempted to do is to look at the results of those interactions. In so doing, the study has found that women's careers are

remarkably similar to men's, a testimony to the strength of the educational institution in forming and reforming careers. What remains for study is the close examination of the influences and interactions themselves, so that we may understand better the dynamics of any individual's career in educational administration.

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